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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 22nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

later: Mr. DJABBARY (Islamic Republic of Iran)
(Vice-Chairman)

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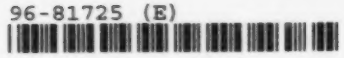

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(c) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (continued)

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Draft resolution on the Convention on Biological Diversity (A/C.2/51/L.5)

1. Mrs. DENGO (Costa Rica) introduced draft resolution A/C.2/51/L.5 on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and on behalf of the members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. She called for its adoption by consensus.

Draft resolution on the implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/C.2/51/L.7)

2. Mrs. DENGO (Costa Rica) introduced draft resolution A/C.2/51/L.7 on the sustainable development of small island developing States and urged its adoption by consensus.

AGENDA ITEM 98: OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Progress at mid-decade on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 45/217 on the World Summit for Children (A/C.2/51/L.8)

3. Mr. ACUÑA (Costa Rica), introducing draft resolution A/C.2/51/L.8, said that the draft resolution had arisen out of concern that progress in some areas of the implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children had been weak. The resolution outlined a course of action for the forthcoming five years in order to reach those goals. He urged its adoption by consensus.

AGENDA ITEM 96: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued) (A/51/59, A/51/73, A/51/87, A/51/120, A/51/127, A/51/138, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/295, A/51/314, A/51/357, A/51/375, A/51/529 and A/50/462-S/1996/831)

(f) ERADICATION OF POVERTY (A/51/443)

4. Mr. KRASSOWSKI (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and proclamation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (A/51/443), said that the issue had again assumed a central place in the work of the United Nations system, as symbolized by the decision to observe 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and to proclaim 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. Moreover, at the World Summit for Social Development, the world's leaders had made a solemn commitment to the goal of eradicating poverty and had adopted a comprehensive programme of action. The report provided a summary of actions taken by the United Nations system in

observance of the Year and a description of initiatives to lay the foundations of a long-term programme of support for the goals and objectives of the Decade. Several earlier reports had already provided a comprehensive review of many of the activities, including those of the inter-agency task forces of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

5. The report offered suggestions and recommendations, including inviting organizations of the United Nations system to provide policy statements outlining their programmes in support of the Decade, recommendations regarding resource mobilization, and ideas to focus public attention on the objectives of the Decade. In that regard, the Assembly might consider identifying a distinct theme for each year under the overall theme that eradicating poverty was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.

6. Mr. AYALA LASSO (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, viewed from a human rights perspective, poverty could be explained by structural and institutional factors rooted in societies, specific barriers such as lack of access to education or resources, and lack of community or family support leading to social dependence. Eradication of poverty required the establishment of a partnership between people living in poverty and the rest of society, based on respect, solidarity and the mutual recognition of the rights and responsibilities of the partners. A successful partnership would rest on the foundation of access to fundamental services, protection and empowerment for families, investment in human resources, sharing of knowledge and training of individuals and institutions to enable them to work with the poor.

7. Although it was well known that each State bore primary responsibility for its own development, the individual State was no longer the sole player. Development required competent government leadership, coherent national policies and strong popular commitment. Eradication of poverty would require integrated strategies where democracy, respect for human rights and sustainable development were mutually reinforcing. Designing policies for economic and social inclusion called for a rethinking of existing institutions.

8. Based on the equal importance of every human right, his Office would be working for the general promotion and protection of human rights, but would give increased attention to economic, social and cultural rights, which had been neglected for many years and which were at the core of problems relating to extreme poverty. At its 1996 coordination segment, the Economic and Social Council had agreed to make a number of improvements in United Nations activities in support of Government efforts to eradicate poverty. He had also undertaken initiatives to address the question of the implementation of the right to development. As the result of their discussions, he and the President of the World Bank had identified five areas of cooperation: exchange of information and cooperation in the preparation of country projects, exchange of expertise on reconstruction and development in the transition to democracy, building national capacities for governance and the rule of law, cooperation among field offices, and human rights education.

9. Turning to the restructuring of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights, he recalled that the Working Group on the Right to Development and the General Assembly had asked for measures to

ensure more effective attention to the realization of that right. Accordingly, a Research and Right to Development Branch had been created to act as a focus for all activities relating to the right to development and in coordinating system-wide activities related to poverty.

10. Mr. ACUÑA (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the time had come to envisage the assessment of poverty eradication activities undertaken at the level of the United Nations system. Poverty eradication represented a major challenge because of its vast scope, complexity and multi-sectoral character, yet the significant decline in multilateral development resources made it difficult to respond to that challenge. On the one hand, there was growing recognition that poverty eradication was a priority; on the other, the general trend of declining resources made an adequate response extremely difficult. Even the reallocation of resources was unlikely to be sufficient when overall availability was uncertain, stagnant or shrinking. Therefore, a predictable and adequate flow of resources was essential if poverty eradication was to be considered a realistic goal. The international community had already reached a consensus that poverty had its origins in the international domain; that had been recognized in both Agenda 21 and the World Summit for Social Development.

11. Direct programmes to eradicate poverty provided useful support during the implementation of economic reforms, but they were not sufficient. That focus must be supplemented by a parallel concern with effective economic policies to create jobs, empower the poor and enhance their participation in the decision-making process. In particular, action should be taken to ensure that women, particularly in developing countries, had access to economic and social opportunities to enhance their ability to contribute to development.

12. The Group of 77 and China requested the Secretary-General to set up an action-oriented programme in support of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, taking into account the sections relating to poverty eradication in the plans of action resulting from the series of global conferences. Those delegations welcomed the initiatives undertaken during the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, but requested an overall assessment of activities throughout the United Nations system in order to stress the lessons learned and reinforce the mechanisms established with a view to maximizing their contribution to the Decade. The report of the Secretary-General requested in General Assembly resolution 50/107 should be submitted for consideration at the special session of the General Assembly in June 1997.

13. Addressing the challenge of poverty by seeking only to ameliorate the conditions of the poor was not sufficient. The root causes and devastating consequences of deprivation, particularly in rural areas, must be addressed at their core. The goal of sustained economic growth and sustainable development could not be achieved without that emphasis.

14. Mr. MURPHY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as Iceland, said that the European Union attached fundamental importance to the issue of poverty eradication and strongly supported its discussion at the multilateral level.

15. The historic commitments to poverty eradication made at the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women should be seen against the backdrop of more than one billion people living in absolute poverty. There was a danger that the over-repetition of that appalling statistic would dull the will for action, but the international community must not allow that to happen.

16. Countries must seek imaginative and specific solutions at the national level; there was also a need, however, for action at the international level. The fulfilment of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) of developed countries devoted to official development assistance must be achieved as soon as possible. There had been some encouraging developments, including the promotion of the 20/20 initiative, the work of the inter-agency task forces in such areas as basic social services for all and employment and sustainable livelihoods, and the renewed policy commitment by many operational agencies to the eradication of poverty in recipient countries. It was imperative that those issues should be kept before decision makers in both developed and developing countries for further action.

17. With regard to the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the eradication of poverty (A/51/443), the European Union saw merit in the first recommendation, but regarding the second and third, on resource mobilization, it suggested that the General Assembly should be guided by the terms of the relevant part of the agreed conclusions which had emerged from the 1996 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. Finally, the European Union was sympathetic to the ideas on specific actions for each year of the Decade contained in the fourth recommendation of the Secretary-General's report.

18. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that the eradication of poverty required access to economic opportunities, basic social services and an enabling environment which would promote sustainable livelihood. The empowerment of people living in poverty should be the cornerstone of development strategies. In both the developing and the developed world, poverty increasingly had a female face. Indeed, over 900 million of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty today were women. Ironically, if that trend continued, the number of absolute poor would increase by the end of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

19. Unfortunately, the approach to poverty eradication was still fraught with flaws, mainly as a result of the prevalence of misconceived stereotypes. Poverty alleviation continued to be equated with welfare. Yet empirical evidence in many parts of the world suggested that overcoming poverty was not only financially feasible but also economically viable. In that connection, investments in many poverty alleviation projects in Bangladesh had been found to be self-sustainable. There was a growing awareness that poor people were willing and capable of pulling themselves out of poverty if they were given access to basic economic opportunities. That insight had led to growing support for micro-credit programmes that served the very poor in urban neighbourhoods and rural areas. In that context, he welcomed the convening of a micro-credit summit in Washington, D.C., from 2 to 4 February 1997, and urged all countries to participate at a high level in order to ensure its successful outcome.

Effective national strategies were needed to substantially reduce overall poverty, including ensuring access of the poor to productive resources, especially access to micro-credit. The United Nations system had a complementary role to play in supporting Governments in their efforts towards that end. The implementation of the global commitments by the international community was essential, since the roots of and the solution to poverty were inextricably linked with the international situation.

20. Mr. Djabbary (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

21. Mr. AZAIEZ (Tunisia) said that poverty eradication had been the main goal of all the major United Nations conferences held during the current decade. The United Nations family had before it a colossal task which could be implemented only by harmonizing the work of the United Nations with that of all its specialized agencies, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in a spirit of complementarity and mutually beneficial cooperation. It was only by harmonizing programmes of work on the eradication of poverty that the international community could ensure the necessary coherence in policy approaches in the field and the integration of all the dimensions established by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). In that regard, Tunisia welcomed the degree of coordination reached by the United Nations system at the country level. The establishment of local coordinating committees involving United Nations and national leaders in a joint effort to work out solutions to problems was an original initiative that Tunisia supported.

22. A consensus had emerged on the need to implement the commitments entered into by Governments at the recent major United Nations conferences on the eradication of poverty. To that end, it was crucial, inter alia, to improve the access of developing countries to world markets and find a solution to their problems of external debt and the transfer of technology.

23. Tunisia had established a national solidarity fund in 1992 to finance various projects for the benefit of low-income social sectors and to contribute to the development of those urban areas without a minimum basic infrastructure. The human dimension on which Tunisia was building its policy had allowed it to heighten the nation's sense of solidarity by placing the poor and disadvantaged categories at the very top of the country's concerns. While Tunisia welcomed the fact that the eradication of poverty was now viewed as a world priority and that the United Nations system was devoting a growing proportion of resources to that end, it was nevertheless concerned that contributions to multilateral development agencies had been declining steadily in recent years. Moreover, official development assistance from countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development had continued to decrease, reaching their lowest level since 1973. Resources allocated to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were also declining. The flow of resources must be predictable, additional and adequate if the eradication of poverty were not to remain a pious wish whose fulfilment must be postponed from decade to decade.

24. The primary goals of enhancing the social safety net of individuals and promoting their integration into society could be achieved only with the firm political will to invest at the national as well as the international level for the well-being of all.

25. Ms. CUI Ying (China) said that the fundamental way to eradicate poverty through sustained efforts was by helping developing countries to develop their internal capability to raise the living standards of their people. It was also necessary to take a comprehensive approach to poverty which reflected economic, social, historic and geographic factors and took into account the principles of sustainable development, protection of the environment and curbs on excessive population growth. Implementing the consensus achieved at international conferences on poverty eradication meant adopting targeted measures that were suited to local realities. Multi-level international cooperation should also be enhanced, with the international community not only effectively fulfilling the commitments it had undertaken at the various international conferences but also carrying out the relevant follow-up actions, including the provision of a favourable external economic environment for developing countries.

26. It was also necessary to enhance coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system, including with the Bretton Woods institutions. Activities carried out by the United Nations system to eradicate poverty should be combined with the actual needs of recipient countries to ensure successful follow-up actions.

27. Because of the great importance that her Government attached to poverty alleviation, it had mobilized resources since 1984 to carry out a national plan to eradicate absolute poverty by the end of the century. The number of people living in poverty in China had declined from 80 million at the end of 1993 to 65 million at the end of 1995.

28. Mr. GARCIA (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the countries of Central America, said he shared the view that poverty had become one of the main challenges currently facing mankind in the context of social and sustainable development. It was a complex and multi-dimensional problem stemming from a variety of factors, especially a profound structural imbalance in all tangible aspects of human existence. That was why the countries of Central America fully endorsed General Assembly resolutions 48/183 and 50/107. Conscious of the fact that an across-the-board, people-centred strategy was required to eradicate poverty, those countries had established the Alliance for Sustainable Development in Central America, which was based on solidarity, subsidiarity, shared responsibility and self-management.

29. The Central American countries had also adopted a treaty on social integration under which they committed themselves, inter alia, to the promotion of sustainable development, environmental protection and investment in social development to overcome the structural factors of poverty, focusing particular attention on disadvantaged populations. Moreover, special emphasis was also being placed on the status of women and children. In that regard, the Alliance had redoubled its commitment to the agreements signed at the World Summit for Children by undertaking to bring domestic legislation in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Efforts were being intensified to bring about equality between men and women, notably by expanding women's opportunities for access to decision-making processes.

30. Notwithstanding the nationwide and regional efforts to fight poverty, the Central American countries were greatly alarmed by the lack of progress on that

front. The international community needed to make a firm commitment to establishing an environment that was propitious to the eradication of poverty. In that context, he was concerned about the extraordinary efforts that the developing countries, particularly the least developed amongst them, were having to make, and the deleterious effect that globalization was having on their economies. That situation made it even more imperative to ensure that programmes to eradicate poverty received fresh financial resources, particularly from the donor community, including an increase in official development assistance and better access to markets along with better prices for the exports of developing countries.

31. The fact that, despite spectacular strides in science and technology in the late twentieth century poverty was still prevalent the world over, suggested that its eradication had more to do with awareness and political commitment, than with technology, know-how or production. Governments, together with civil society, had to redefine objectives for the whole society through a new kind of partnership, and develop specific policies to fight poverty. The Central American countries appreciated the solidarity and political will mobilized by the United Nations, as reflected in document A/51/443, and welcomed the UNDP decision to establish a fund to eradicate poverty.

32. The Central American countries were going through a period of transition during which they were trying to overcome the after-effects of recent armed conflicts and to draw up development policies which would strengthen the reconciliation between society and democratic institutions. They wished to reiterate the important role that the Economic and Social Council played as coordinator of the United Nations system-wide activities for the eradication of poverty, in the context of the follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences. All Member States should demonstrate greater solidarity and should propose concrete actions that would effectively contribute to the activities organized in the context of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

33. Mr. BIAOU (Benin) said that, since all countries of the world were affected by the problem of absolute poverty and its consequences, the statements and well-meaning declarations on poverty would not help if resolute action was not taken by decision-making bodies to combat that scourge. Indeed, at the World Summit for Social Development, the heads of State and Government had recognized that the task of combating poverty was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. Eradicating poverty required the establishment, implementation, and follow-up, with the full involvement of people living in poverty, of relevant strategies and programmes. In that regard, his delegation welcomed the international community's awareness of what needed to be done to halt and reverse the alarming trend towards increasing poverty. The variety of activities undertaken by the United Nations in that field should be assessed and a detailed report prepared thereon for submission to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

34. At the national level, his Government was doing its utmost, given the meagre financial resources at its disposal, to gradually raise the quality of basic services, such as education, health care, and food security, for its people. Given the situation of poverty and need in which the people of the

towns and rural areas lived, the Government's aim in the medium and long term was to create favourable conditions that would enable the grass-roots communities to enjoy a common social subsistence level. That concept, which would be refined as Benin itself developed, would initially be limited to food security, basic education, providing access to services and primary health care and developing the capacity to generate capital. In the effort to attain that objective, persons living in poverty, local and grass-roots communities together with families and individuals organized within development units would be the primary players. He hoped that the international community, including development partners, would help his country to achieve its goals. On the eve of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, it was vital to redouble efforts at all levels in order to mobilize the resources required for the implementation of strategies and programmes for the eradication of poverty.

35. Mr. ADHIKARY (Nepal) said that while his delegation agreed that the primary responsibility for poverty eradication lay with national Governments, the international community must contribute to the creation of a favourable economic environment. The international economy was becoming increasingly unfavourable to the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. The decline in official development assistance had reached a point where the average percentage was only .27 per cent of the developed countries' GNP. In that context, he expressed his country's gratitude to the Nordic countries for maintaining their high level of assistance flows.

36. In many developing countries, the production sector was not well equipped and there were problems in the distribution of goods and services to rural areas. Investment in medium- and small-scale enterprises could help to create jobs in villages and remote areas. Those efforts must be complemented by encouraging small loans to grass-roots entrepreneurs, particularly women. The assistance of the international community in that area was essential, as Governments alone could not afford to carry out such programmes.

37. Under the new world trade regime, the least developed countries were suffering from adverse conditions in international markets. The international community should take steps to offset their built-in handicaps if it was really serious about the eradication of poverty worldwide. As a first step, measures should be taken to enable their products to have free and unrestricted access to international markets.

38. Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) and Bolivia and Chile, which were associate members, said that measures to eradicate poverty must be taken at the national level. The Governments of the MERCOSUR countries and Bolivia and Chile had therefore made poverty eradication a priority objective and had included it in their overall national development strategies and in specific poverty eradication policies and programmes.

39. Emphasis must be placed on the human dimension of economic development, since economic growth should provide opportunities for all members of society. It was therefore essential to incorporate balanced and socially sustainable development into all economic activities. Conditions must be created for

qualitatively superior development that met the needs of the population. Both developed and developing countries should take measures to ensure that economic growth generated sufficient and adequately paid employment. However, even if sustainable development processes succeeded in creating jobs and providing basic social services, there would still be a need for specific policies aimed at solving the problems of marginalization and vulnerability of the poorest sectors of the population. Such policies should include well-designed programmes that reached the target groups. The main objective of such programmes should be to promote self-sufficiency; they should not encourage dependence or provide disincentives to personal effort.

40. Measures could and should be taken at the international level. For example, the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was very useful in that respect, as was the convening in 1997 of a summit on micro-credit, whose purpose was to seek ways to provide credit to the world's 100 million poorest families, especially the women in those families. On the eve of the twenty-first century, the eradication of poverty was a priority objective for both individual Governments and the international community, and individual and collective efforts should be made in order to ensure the success of that undertaking.

41. Mr. TIENDREBEOGO (Burkina Faso) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

42. The proclamation of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty underscored the efforts of States, the United Nations system and other participants in the development process to eliminate that scourge. With respect to the suggestions and recommendations for specific activities during the Decade, contained at the end of the Secretary-General's report (A/51/443), his delegation supported recommendation 4, which dealt with activities for each year of the Decade. At the same time, it regretted that United Nations funds, programmes and agencies had merely been requested to prepare a programme of observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. In spite of the importance it attached to communication and information, his delegation would prefer that the budgets allocated for the observance of the International Day were instead used to finance specific projects in poor countries.

43. His delegation looked forward to the results of the work of the Working Group on Poverty of the Consultative Committee for Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and the inter-agency task forces of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

44. More thought should be given to the choice of a theme for each year of the Decade, since the use of an anniversary of a major United Nations conference might lead to difficult choices for years in which the anniversaries of equally important conferences coincided. His delegation supported the two recommendations on resource mobilization contained in the report.

45. The question of resources - human and technological as well as financial - was at the heart of the debate on poverty. While there was no question that

individual States were primarily responsible for the mobilization and best use of resources, many countries, particularly the least developed, were too poor and lacked the necessary social and economic structures to do so. Only the political will of the entire international community would make it possible to attack the root causes of poverty.

46. Mr. SFEIR-YOUNIS (World Bank) said that the concepts of growth, sustainable development and poverty were closely related. Growth was a necessary condition for poverty alleviation. With regard to sustainability, it was well known that the poor lived in environmentally degraded areas and that the dynamic of poverty manifested itself through unsustainable development. In that context, the identification and design of a set of consistent and effective investment programmes, policies, instruments and institutional reforms to achieve the objectives of growth, sustainable development and poverty alleviation required a common denominator. Capital accumulation - the way in which societies dealt with their existing assets - could be that common denominator.

47. Poverty could be linked to capital accumulation by focusing on poverty as the inability to accumulate capital in its various forms. Thus, a poverty-alleviation programme might need to be framed in terms of both general labour-intensive methods of employment and providing the poor with education, health care and other services, together with the establishment of safety nets. Such a programme might also need to be designed in terms of enhancing poor people's ability to accumulate capital. In order to attain the objectives linked to growth, sustainable development and poverty alleviation, it was necessary to consider the nature and scope of all facets of the capital accumulation process.

48. In some areas of the world, the number of poor people was increasing in absolute and relative terms. One of the causes of impoverishment had to do with the limits and boundaries of economic policies with respect to natural resources and the environment. In many instances, the assumption had been that incentives and regulations should be established primarily for non-renewable resources. Not all countries had considered similar actions with regard to renewable resources, since they believed that those resources would not become scarce in the near future. However, that hypothesis was no longer true.

49. Another area that required specific attention was related to subsidies. In many instances, subsidies had not benefited the poor. In addition, the administration of subsidies was expensive and the cost of reaching out to the large majority of poor people was becoming prohibitively high. Finally, demographic factors should be taken into account in the design and implementation of poverty-alleviation programmes. The rapid increase in the world's population and the rate of urban development posed new challenges to all those engaged in eradicating poverty in the world.

50. Mrs. GOCO (Philippines) said that her delegation was pleased that so much had been done by the United Nations system to meet the challenge of poverty through its coherent and coordinated elaboration of institutional responses. The three ACC inter-agency task forces should carry out their mandates to their fullest in order to provide a solid foundation for the Organization's support for each Member State's efforts to eradicate poverty.

51. The Government of the Philippines had therefore set for itself the specific target of reducing poverty from 39.2 per cent in 1991 to 30 per cent in 1998. In order to meet that target, President Ramos had established the Presidential Commission to Fight Poverty. The Commission was a high-level oversight body for coordinating all government programmes and projects in the fight against poverty and to advocate a six-point strategy to (1) revive economic growth by creating jobs, (2) sustain such growth, (3) expand social services to meet minimum basic needs, (4) foster sustainable income-generating community projects, (5) enhance the capabilities of the poor to help themselves, and (6) emphasize the importance of local action. On the basis of the strategy and assisted by a number of United Nations agencies, the Commission had shaped the Philippine Government's Social Reform Agenda, also known as the National Action Agenda Against Poverty.

52. The need for sustained economic growth as a means of alleviating poverty and improving social services could not be overemphasized. In the fast-growing economies of East Asia, increased income had resulted in comparatively better social indicators, such as a substantial decline in infant mortality in recent years. While it still had a sizeable number of people - around 180 million - living below the poverty line, East Asia was in a better position to solve the problem of poverty in a relatively shorter period of time than any other region in the developing world.

53. Her delegation hoped that the conclusions and recommendations of the ACC inter-agency task forces would promote broader and more coherent coordination and help expand multilateral or bilateral assistance and cooperation programmes to eradicate poverty.

54. Mrs. PATEL (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), said that her delegation and the other members of SADC fully associated themselves with the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

55. As in the majority of developing countries, the feminization of poverty was on the rise in southern Africa and was particularly acute in households headed by women. That situation was perpetuated by political and economic inequality between men and women and the rising number of female school drop-outs. The key to the empowerment of women was equal access to education, which would lead to their full and equal participation in the formulation of economic and social policies to eradicate poverty.

56. With modest economic growth, the capacity of most SADC countries to create jobs was limited; that had compelled people to look for work in the informal sector. According to estimates made by the World Health Organization (WHO), 61 per cent of urban employment in sub-Saharan Africa was to be found in the informal sectors. That had resulted in high levels of urban agriculture as an important survival strategy. There was also an acute problem of housing and shelter that had resulted in slums and squatter camps in most southern African cities; those makeshift settlements often lacked water and sanitation. In addition, the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic continued to devastate the region.

57. Long-term measures were needed to curb the growth of inhumane urban dwellings, and the countries of SADC called upon their development partners to assist them in upgrading settlements by providing basic social services.

58. The negative effect of structural adjustment programmes in most SADC countries had forced more people into poverty, and some even below the poverty line. In that context, the enhanced structural adjustment facility should be strengthened. The modest rise in GDP growth from 2.6 per cent to 2.9 per cent in the southern African subregion in 1995 was being curtailed by recurrent drought. The international community should therefore provide assistance to those countries in the subregion affected by drought. In the countries where rainfall had been adequate, the presence of anti-personnel landmines impeded development in certain rural areas. In that regard, SADC thanked the European Union, the United States of America and others that had provided it with assistance in mine clearance, and called upon the international community to increase its assistance to SADC in that area.

59. Her delegation welcomed the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on poverty eradication (A/51/443). The SADC countries had already established national plans for poverty eradication, which laid the groundwork for United Nations assistance. The SADC countries welcomed the active role envisaged for the resident coordinator system proposed by the Secretary-General in his report. The SADC countries fully supported the recommendations on resource mobilization contained in recommendation 2 at the end of that report, and also concurred with the proposal to adopt the logo for the Year as the logo for the Decade. With regard to the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the SADC countries requested clarification on the essence of the recommendation. Finally, while they agreed on the need for awareness-raising, that activity should not be the main purpose of the Decade.

60. Mr. NORBERT (Madagascar) said that poverty eradication was the major challenge facing the international community at the end of the twentieth century, particularly since poverty was at the root of other scourges, including environmental degradation, social unrest and human rights violations, all of which impeded development efforts. Efforts to reduce poverty during the past three decades had had encouraging results, but much remained to be done.

61. Notwithstanding the good intentions announced at the World Summit for Social Development, official development assistance continued to decline significantly and was increasingly being saddled with conditionalities. The heavy debt and debt-servicing burden borne by the developing countries hampered their development efforts; the debt of the poorest countries should be reduced, if not written off altogether, to enable them to implement their economic and structural reform programmes on a sound footing. Partnerships involving the public and private sectors, civil society and the international community were needed to elaborate and implement integrated poverty eradication strategies.

62. His Government attached particular importance to the eradication of poverty and had tackled the underlying problems, bearing in mind their close interrelationship. A national poverty eradication programme had been introduced which was mobilizing all the resources and players in the country.

63. Poverty was particularly severe on the African continent, and a number of initiatives had been taken by African Governments in collaboration with the international development community. His delegation welcomed in particular the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa. Recognizing that their development was primarily the responsibility of the African countries themselves, their Governments had striven to bring about peace, had introduced political and economic reforms to promote liberalization, diversified production and accorded priority to regional integration and cooperation with a view to creating economies of scale.

64. Unfortunately, the results had not lived up to expectations. Private investment flows to the continent had been meagre, and the resources had been directed instead to developing countries in Asia and Eastern Europe. National reforms also had been undermined by the steady decline in commodity prices. As a result, the African continent was in danger of being marginalized in an unfavourable economic environment and of sinking even further into underdevelopment. Accordingly, the wealthy countries should honour the commitments they had made at the recent international conferences organized by the United Nations. The eradication of poverty required a massive mobilization of additional resources, not the mere reallocation of resources.

65. Mr. BAHAMONDES (Canada) said that the efforts of the United Nations to eradicate poverty constituted both a moral imperative and a collective undertaking with a direct bearing on the interests of all countries, rich and poor alike. An effective response to the challenge of eradicating poverty, which must address its root causes, required concerted and sustained action at the national and international levels. A more coordinated, systematic and long-term approach to the issue was needed. Nations must work in partnership to develop an enabling environment in which conditions for sustainable and equitable development could be fostered. That required an approach to development which valued responsible economic management, respected human rights, affirmed gender equity, assured access to productive assets and met basic human needs. Moreover, the benefits of growth should be shared more equitably. The productive capacity of people living in poverty would not be realized if they were further marginalized.

66. A focus on such fundamentals was all the more essential in an era of shrinking resources. His country had recently further strengthened its commitment to poverty eradication, committing 25 per cent of its official development assistance to meeting basic human needs through a poverty reduction policy which sought to reduce both the number of people living in poverty and the extent of their deprivation.

67. The most effective use of resources also required coordination among donors, minimizing duplication and concentrating donor efforts on areas in which they had a comparative advantage. His delegation welcomed efforts undertaken by UNDP to coordinate programme efforts at the country level. It was essential, however, to recognize that approaches to reduce poverty at the country level were best developed, managed and monitored under the leadership of the recipient Government. It was also important to set realistic and measurable targets, such as the recent commitment by Canada and other countries members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to, inter alia,

reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015.

68. The report by the Secretary-General (A/51/443) provided a good point of departure for action by the United Nations system in preparation for the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. The recommendations for United Nations system follow-up were practical. The Commission for Social Development had an important role as the intergovernmental focal point for discussions on poverty eradication. His delegation urged other bodies concerned with that issue to assist the Commission in fulfilling its mandate in that area and encouraged the Secretariat to provide the Commission with all possible support. It was now important to ensure the implementation of Commission resolution S-1996/1 relating to the eradication of poverty and the agreed conclusions of the 1996 coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council. His delegation hoped that the conclusions and recommendations of the inter-agency task forces on follow-up to international conferences would contribute, inter alia, to a coherent United Nations system response and support country programming, particularly the planning and implementation of the country strategy note.

69. The Secretary-General's report was not sufficiently clear on how to monitor and evaluate results of system efforts to eradicate poverty, and more work was needed on that subject. In conclusion, his delegation remained committed to supporting and enhancing the effectiveness of the crucial role of the United Nations in the international community's effort to eradicate poverty.

70. Mr. SINGH BARNALA (India) said that although the causes of poverty were complex and included varied social, economic, historical, natural and geographical factors, it must be emphasized that its origin lay in a lack of income which, in turn, was linked to the general economic situation of the country concerned and the pattern of income distribution. To conquer poverty, a development strategy was needed, combining efforts to achieve general economic growth with programmes addressing the needs of specific categories of the population within the context of a favourable international economic environment and situation-specific approaches.

71. His country was implementing a large-scale programme to create work opportunities in rural areas throughout the country and a massive self-employment programme for urban micro-enterprises and small businesses. An integrated programme for child development services targeted half of India and a programme was in place to make commodities available to the poor at below-market prices. In addition, a programme to empower women to gain access to and control over their resources had been formulated. Since there were no universally acceptable models of development, the people must be involved in the process of policy planning for development, and his Government had taken steps to that end. Social development needs also would receive enhanced attention. India intended to promote growth with social justice and hoped to eradicate absolute poverty by the year 2005.

72. The commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development provided another opportunity to enhance international cooperation to meet the challenge of poverty eradication. It was therefore particularly unfortunate that the

ninth International Development Association replenishment was likely to be at reduced real levels. The forthcoming special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 would provide another opportunity to address the link between poverty and the environment.

73. Mr. WIJKMAN (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the elimination of mass poverty, which was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative, required the concerted effort of all players at the local, national, regional and global levels and above all, of the very people who were currently excluded from the benefits of technological progress and globalization. In addition, poor people must no longer be perceived primarily as degraders of the environment; rather, they must be enabled to enhance their livelihoods by building assets from the natural resource base on which they directly depended. Generally speaking, poverty eradication had been a missing link in the efforts to implement Agenda 21, and the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21 should address that issue.

74. The commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development had had a profound impact on UNDP: nearly 40 per cent of UNDP core resources for projects approved in 1994-1995 had been allocated to programmes for poverty eradication and livelihoods for the poor. The eradication of poverty was the central priority of UNDP programming. Primary attention was devoted to supporting the preparation, formulation and implementation of national poverty strategies and plans. The newly established poverty strategies initiative, a multi-donor effort to speed up assistance for the formulation and implementation of national anti-poverty strategies, supported advocacy activities, poverty and social policy analysis and monitoring. In seven months, support had been provided to over 50 countries, and the number was expected to rise to 90-100 countries by the end of 1997.

75. Because the challenge of reorienting UNDP to become the leading anti-poverty agency of the United Nations was considerable, UNDP was working with other organizations in the United Nations system on a coordinated strategy to help recipient countries attack poverty. UNDP was active in all the inter-agency task forces established to coordinate follow-up to the conferences. UNDP also participated in the work of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy to develop a common set of indicators to be used in the preparation of common country assessments, and was working with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to advance work on issues concerning economic globalization and technological change and their effect on poverty.

76. Progress in eliminating mass poverty depended very much on the policy framework within which anti-poverty programmes were pursued, and it was necessary to pay greater attention to how economic globalization and liberalization affected equity and distribution at the national and regional levels. UNDP and other agencies which supported capacity-building must involve institutions of civil society and the private sector more intensively, in collaborative partnership with Governments, in order to promote approaches based on the needs of the poor. Moreover, poverty reduction was as much a natural resource management and governance issue as it was a social and economic one.

The challenge therefore was to devise innovative ways to support the various dimensions of sustainable human development in a mutually reinforcing manner.

77. Mr. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) said that his delegation welcomed the inclusion of the question of the eradication of poverty in the work of the three ACC inter-agency task forces, and looked forward to the consideration of the report on the work of the task forces at the first session of ACC in April 1997. In that regard, it was important to determine how the task forces would deal with decisions adopted on the subject at sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council, and whether the task forces would be able to consider those decisions in its report, bearing in mind that a number of bodies to which the Council had made specific recommendations would not yet exist by April 1997.

78. In paragraph 48 of his report (A/51/443), the Secretary-General referred to the preparation of a report by the three ACC inter-agency task forces, and he wondered whether the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality would participate in the preparation of the report and in what capacity. With regard to the report as a whole, his delegation reaffirmed the need to develop, under the auspices of ACC, a unified system-wide approach to the provision of assistance to national Governments in monitoring and evaluating the achievement of poverty eradication objectives.

79. The task of the United Nations in the global fight against poverty was to identify problems and develop approaches common to all countries. At the country level, such approaches should be implemented with due regard for local conditions and should be based on a partnership between the United Nations development system, the Bretton Woods institutions and Governments. Governments bore the main responsibility for implementing national poverty-alleviation plans and programmes.

80. The international community should be realistic and avoid millenarian illusions of creating a paradise on Earth. The complete eradication of poverty was a noble but unattainable goal, and efforts should focus on the eradication of absolute and mass poverty and on the root causes of that phenomenon.

81. Miss JAIDI (Morocco) said that the international community must elaborate a genuine strategy to alleviate poverty. Although efforts to combat poverty were primarily the responsibility of individual countries, improved coordination of support at the national, regional and international levels was crucial to the achievement of that goal. An enabling, stable and predictable international economic environment would facilitate the efforts of the developing countries to combat poverty. Accordingly, economic, financial and monetary policies should be harmonized at the global level.

82. Poverty-alleviation strategies required far-reaching efforts to provide the most disadvantaged members of society with access to resources and income and must eliminate the legal, social and economic handicaps which perpetuated inequality. Such strategies also should promote sustainable, human-centred development, with special attention to the needs of women and children. All the

partners in society must participate in multi-dimensional and integrated efforts, with the support of the international community.

83. The contribution of the international community, in particular the multilateral financial institutions, was crucial in an increasingly interdependent world economy. Although globalization created opportunities for growth, it also generated frustration and gave rise to consumption patterns which marginalized large segments of society. Her delegation's adherence to the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development demonstrated its determination to improve the well-being of mankind. The Moroccan Government had elaborated a social development strategy which focused on extending social services to the poorest members of society, enhancing social benefits, promoting employment and creating new sources of income. The strategy also called for the elaboration of a national plan of action to combat poverty, and the groups concerned would be involved in all stages of its preparation and implementation. Measures were also being adopted to protect children and women.

84. The initial phase of Morocco's social development programme, which enjoyed the support of the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF, the European Union and the French Development Fund, was designed to eliminate regional imbalances and all disparities within society through a more decentralized social and rural policy to improve the access of low-income inhabitants to basic infrastructures and services and thereby expand opportunities for development and growth. In observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, her Government, with the assistance of UNDP, had organized various events to mobilize all segments of society in the effort to combat poverty.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.